

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A fire barrier protecting an object comprising:

an organic bentonite-based material;

an outer boundary surface disposed to retain the material in a selected location, the location at least partially surrounding the object, wherein the outer boundary surface comprises an annular plastic sheet;

wherein the organic bentonite-based material is disposed within the outer boundary surface such that a top surface of the material remains uncovered and exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based material within the outer boundary; and the organic bentonite-based material forming a region about the object, the region configured to prevent plant growth and thereby protect the object from fire.

2. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the boundary surface comprises a retaining device configured to retain the material.

3. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the object comprises a pole.

4. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed surrounding the base of the pole.

5. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of between about 6 inches to about 10 feet.

6. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of between about 2 inches and about 5 feet.

7. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of about 3 feet.

8. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth in the range of between about .25 inches and about 4 feet.

9. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth in the range of between about 4 inches and about 2 feet.

10. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth of about 8 inches.

11. (Canceled).

12. (Previously Presented) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the boundary surface comprises the edges of a depression.

13. (Currently Amended) A method for protecting an object from fire, said method comprising:

preparing an area surrounding an object for receiving an outer boundary surface, the area extending from the object a distance suitable to keep vegetation outside the area from igniting the object;

disposing the outer boundary surface to retain a material in a location, the location at least partially surrounding the object, the outer boundary surface comprising a circular plastic sheet configured to retain a mixture; and

depositing an organic bentonite-based mixture comprising at least 50% bentonite within the outer boundary surface, a top surface of the bentonite-based mixture remaining exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based mixture within the outer boundary surface, the bentonite based mixture creating a hostile growing environment for vegetation.

14. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, wherein preparing an area comprises excavating a depression about the object for holding the mixture.

15. (Canceled).

16. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, wherein depositing the mixture further comprises depositing the mixture in a radius about the object.

17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, further comprising depositing the mixture and forming an upward slope towards the object.

18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, wherein depositing the mixture further comprises pumping the mixture from a source.

19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 13, further comprising adding bentonite to the bentonite based mixture in response to signs of vegetation growth within the bentonite based mixture.

20. (Previously Presented) A barrier protecting an object from fire comprising:

an organic object;

an organic bentonite-based mixture comprising at least 50% bentonite and up to 50% soil;

an annular plastic sheet disposed to retain the mixture in a selected location, the location at least partially surrounding the object;

the mixture is disposed around the object, between the plastic sheet and the object such that a top surface of the mixture remains uncovered and exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based mixture between the plastic sheet and the object, and extending outward from the object a distance of about 3 feet and to a depth of about 8 inches; and

wherein the organic bentonite-based mixture creates a hostile vegetation growth region about the object, absorbing water and maintaining a salinity level toxic to vegetation thereby protecting the object from combustion of vegetation within the location.